

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An apparatus for delivering a cardiac harness, comprising:
an elongate body having a proximal portion and a distal portion, said body having a cavity sized to contain said harness in a compacted configuration;
a plurality of elongate push rods longitudinally movable with respect to said body, said cardiac harness releasably connected to each of said push rods such that advancement of said push rods in a distal direction moves said harness from said compacted configuration in said cavity to an expanded configuration outside said cavity, said apparatus further comprising a releasing member which releases the connections between said push rods and said harness upon actuation of said member by a user.
2. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein said cardiac harness is releasably connected to each push rod at at least first and second longitudinally spaced locations.
3. The apparatus of Claim 1, additionally comprising a positioning arrangement configured to secure said apparatus in a desired position relative to a heart.
4. The apparatus of Claim 3, wherein said positioning arrangement comprises suction cup member.
5. The apparatus of Claim 1, additionally comprising a handle and a control assembly, said handle being fixed to said proximal portion of said elongate body and said control assembly supporting said plurality of elongate push rods.
6. An apparatus for delivering a cardiac harness, comprising:
a support member, said cardiac harness being preloaded on said support member and attached to said support member by a line, said line comprised of a series of interconnected loops which form a releasable stitch.
7. The apparatus of Claim 6, wherein an end one of said interconnected loops of said stitch is retained by an anchoring member which prevents unravelment of said series of loops, and wherein the release of said loop from said anchoring member allows unravelment of said series of interconnected loops.
8. The apparatus of Claim 7, wherein said anchoring member is fixed for movement with a release member, an end of said line being attached to said release member,

and wherein movement of said release member in a direction away from said support member releases said loop from said anchoring member and unravels said series of interconnected loops.

9. An apparatus for delivering a cardiac harness, comprising:

an elongate body having a proximal portion and a distal portion;

a plurality of push rods longitudinally movable with respect to said body, said cardiac harness releasably connected to each of the push rods such that movement of said push rods in a distal direction advances said harness onto said heart, said harness being releasable from the push rods such that the push rods may be withdrawn from said harness proximally along a withdrawal path while said harness remains on said heart, said distal portion of said push rods having an inward facing surface which presses against said harness during said withdrawal, said inward facing surface configured such that non-frictional force components parallel to said path and attributable to forces exerted by said inner surface on said harness are directed distally, without substantial non-frictional force components directed proximally.

10. The apparatus of Claim 9, wherein the distal portions of the push rods splay outwardly during advancement.

11. The apparatus of Claim 9, wherein the distal portions of the push rods are canted outwardly.

12. A method of delivering a cardiac harness, comprising:

providing a cardiac harness that is preloaded on a support member, said harness attached to said support member by a line forming a releasable stitch;

positioning said harness so that said harness surrounds a portion of a heart of a patient;

disconnecting said harness from said support member by releasing said releasable stitch without cutting said line.

13. The method of Claim 12, wherein said line comprises a series of interconnected loops, including a retention loop, said releasing comprising releasing said retention loop and unraveling said series of loops.

14. The method of Claim 12, wherein said positioning comprises positioning said harness to apply a compressive force to said portion of the heart.

15. The method of Claim 12, wherein said positioning comprises orienting said harness in a predetermined orientation with respect to said heart.

16. The method of Claim 12, wherein said positioning comprises forming an incision in the patient and inserting the harness through the incision in a compacted configuration.

17. The method of Claim 16, comprising expanding said harness into an expanded configuration after inserting said harness through said incision.

18. The method of Claim 17, comprising moving a releasing member outside the patient's body to release said stitch.

19. The method of Claim 18, comprising using said releasing member to pull the line through the incision and out of the patients body.

20. An apparatus for creating a passage through the pericardium of a patient to permit access of a cardiac harness delivery device to the heart, comprising:

an introducer sleeve having an outer wall defining a proximal end and a distal end, the outer wall having a reduced diameter portion adjacent said distal end, said reduced diameter portion defining a reduced orientation having a first diameter;

a dilator sleeve, said dilator sleeve being sized and shaped to be insertable into said introducer sleeve to urge said reduced diameter portion into an expanded orientation having a second diameter, larger than said first diameter, said second diameter being of a size sufficient to permit the apparatus to pass therethrough.

21. The apparatus of Claim 20, additionally comprising a biasing member surrounding said outer wall of said introducer sleeve, said biasing member being configured to bias said reduced diameter portion into said reduced orientation.

22. The apparatus of Claim 20, wherein said outer wall of said introducer sleeve comprises a plurality of cut out portions extending parallel to a longitudinal axis of said outer wall, said cut out portions extending at least through said reduced diameter portion of said outer wall.

23. An apparatus for assisting the loading of a cardiac harness to a delivery device having a plurality of elongated push rods, comprising:

an outer wall defining a generally funnel shaped portion, said funnel shaped portion including a plurality of channels configured to receive said plurality of elongated push rods, said outer wall being configured to support said push rods in an outwardly splayed orientation.

24. The apparatus of Claim 23, wherein a portion of each of said plurality of channels opens to at least one of an inward-facing surface and an outward-facing surface of said outer wall.

25. The apparatus of Claim 23, wherein said outer wall additionally comprises a generally cylindrical portion extending from a lower end of said funnel shaped portion, said cylindrical portion being configured to receive a distal end portion of the delivery device.